THE PLAY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Swami Muktananda and Siddha Yoga

Over the years, my wife, Christina, and I have observed in our work and personally experienced many remarkable synchronicities. Sometimes these were isolated occurrences; other times they came in entire chains and aggregates. However, there was a period of eight years in our lives when we had the opportunity to encounter and observe synchronicities on a mass scale. This was the time of our close relationship with Swami Muktananda, Indian spiritual teacher and head of the ancient Siddha Yoga lineage. In 1975, when Christina and I met in Big Sur, California, and started working and living together, Christina was Swami Muktananda's student and ardent follower. She had met him when he had stopped in Honolulu during his first world tour, accompanied by Ram Dass, famous Harvard psychology professor and psychedelic researcher turned spiritual seeker and teacher.

Christina was at that time experiencing a powerful awakening of Kundalini, which had started during the delivery of her first child, Nathaniel, and had been further intensified and deepened by the delivery of her daughter, Sarah, two years later. According to the yogic tradition, Kundalini, also called the Serpent Power, is the generative cosmic energy, feminine in nature, which is responsible for the creation of the universe. It has its representation in the subtle or energy body, a field that pervades and permeates, as well as surrounds, the human physical body. In its latent form, it resides in the sacral area, at the base of the spine. The name Kundalini means literally "the coiled

one," and it is usually depicted as a snake twisted three and half times aroun the lingam, symbol of the male generative power. This dormant energy ca become activated by meditation, specific exercises, the intervention of an ex perienced spiritual teacher (guru), or for unknown reasons.

The activated Kundalini, called *shakti*, rises through the *nadis*, channels o conduits in the subtle body. As it ascends, it clears old traumatic imprints an opens the centers of psychic and spiritual energy, called *chakras*. Awakenin of Kundalini is thus conducive to healing, spiritual opening, and positive per sonality transformation. This process, although highly valued and considere beneficial in the yogic tradition, is not without dangers and requires exper guidance by a guru whose Kundalini is fully awakened and stabilized. Th most dramatic signs of Kundalini awakening are physical and psychologica manifestations called *kriyas*. The kriyas involve intense sensations of energy and heat streaming up the spine, which can be associated with violent shaking spasms, and twisting movements.

Powerful waves of seemingly unmotivated emotions, such as anxiety, anger sadness, or joy and ecstatic rapture, can surface and temporarily dominate the psyche. This can be accompanied by visions of brilliant light or various archetypal beings and a variety of internally perceived sounds. Many people involved in this process also often have powerful experiences of what seem to be memories from past lives. Involuntary and often uncontrollable behaviors complete the picture: speaking in tongues, chanting unknown songs or sacred invocations (*mantras*), assuming yogic postures (*asanas*) and gestures (*mudras*), and making a variety of animal sounds and movements.

Swami Muktananda had the reputation of being a perfected master, an accomplished Kundalini yogi, capable of awakening spiritual energy in his disciples. Christina heard about his visit to Hawaii from her friends and decided to attend an "intensive," as Muktananda called weekend retreats he was offering. During one of the meditations in this retreat, Christina received from him *shaktipat*, which is the Sanskrit name for transfer of spiritual energy from the guru, mediated by a touch, a look, or even a thought. For Christina, this powerful energy transfer occurred when Muktananda looked at her and their

eyes met. At this point, she experienced a penetrating lightning bolt radiating from the guru's eyes and hitting her between her eyes in the area where the spiritual traditions place the "third eye." This triggered intense *kriyas*, waves of overwhelming emotions and shaking.

The experience with Muktananda greatly intensified Christina's process of Kundalini awakening, which had already been well underway before she met him. This was the beginning of her important relationship with this remarkable Siddha yogi, which lasted until 1982, when he died at the age of seventy-four. After the weekend retreat, Christina offered as a meeting place for Muktananda's devotees her small apartment in Honolulu, where she lived after her divorce with her children, Than and Sarah. Muktananda accepted her offer, visited her apartment, and blessed it as a Siddha Yoga meditation center. After leaving Hawaii, Christina tried to use any opportunity to reconnect with her teacher.

Shortly after Christina and I started living together at Esalen, Swami Muktananda came to the Bay Area to spend several months in his ashram in Oakland, near San Francisco. Oakland is only about a three-hours' drive from Big Sur, where we lived, and Christina used this occasion to arrange for the two of us a personal audience, or *darshan*, with her spiritual teacher. As I found out later, she was uncertain whether Swami Muktanada would approve of our relationship and wanted to find out. I could certainly understand her concerns. Being a "transcendental hedonist," as I often jokingly referred to myself, I did not exactly meet the conventional Indian criteria for an austere spiritual seeker. I was not a vegetarian, enjoyed sex, and was known for my work with LSD and other psychedelic substances.

I had heard about Swami Muktananda before I met Christina, and had the chance to leaf through a manuscript of his autobiography, entitled *Guru*, later to become *The Play of Consciousness*. I was not particularly eager to drive to Oakland to meet him because I had somewhat mixed feelings about him. Two of my friends had converted to Siddha Yoga and were showing what I saw as an uncritical passionate devotion to Muktananda. They were certainly not the best advertisements for Muktananda and the influence he had on his followers.

Their behavior drastically changed following their attendance of a Muktananda weekend intensive and created much commotion at Esalen. Instead of covering the topic they had promised in the Esalen catalog, they brought into their workshops little drums and cymbals and tried to engage the participants in chanting "Shree Guru Gita," "Om Namah Shivaya," and other Hindu devotional chants.

Devotional yoga had never been my favorite spiritual practice. According to the ancient Indian tradition, people with different personalities need and seek different types of yoga. While Christina's preference was without any doubt bhakti yoga, an approach emphasizing devotion to the guru, I felt great affinity to jñana yoga, a spiritual strategy that pushes the intellect to its utmost limits, where it has to surrender. I also resonated very much with raja yoga, a system that focuses on psychological experiment and a direct experience of the divine. I could easily accept karma yoga, the yoga of service accumulating karmic merits, but bhakti yoga was low on my scale of values.

But because I am very curious by nature, my reservations about devotional practice did not override my interest in meeting a Siddha Yoga guru with Muktananda's reputation. And I knew that this darshan was very important for Christina. As we were driving toward the Bay Area, Christina kept telling me some remarkable stories about her spiritual teacher, as a preparation for our meeting. We overestimated the time it would take us to drive from Big Sur to Oakland because this was not our usual route, and arrived at the ashram about twenty minutes before our scheduled meeting.

While we were sitting in the car waiting for the darshan, we continued our discussion about Swami Muktananda. At one point, Christina mentioned that he was a Shaivite, which means a follower of Shiva. This captured my attention and increased my interest in meeting him. I knew that among the methods the Shaivites were using to get into non-ordinary states of consciousness was ingestion of bhang and datura seeds. And I considered Shiva to be my most important personal archetype because the two most powerful and meaningful experiences I have ever had in my psychedelic sessions involved this Indian deity. As we were waiting, I described these two experiences at some length to Christina.

My first encounter with Shiva occurred in one of my early LSD sessions, when I was still in Prague. I spent the first four hours of this session in the birth canal, reliving the trauma of my birth. As I was emerging from the birth canal, all battered, covered with blood, and tasting vaginal secretions, I had a terrifying vision of the Hindu goddess Kali and experienced a complete unconditional surrender to the power of the feminine principle in the universe. At that moment, I saw a gigantic figure of Bhairava, Shiva in his Destroyer aspect, towering above me. I felt crushed by his foot and smeared like a piece of excrement on what seemed to be the deepest bottom of the universe. It was a complete annihilation of what I then considered to be my identity, a shattering death of my body and ego. But having become nothing, I became everything. I had a sense of dissolving in a source of light of indescribable intensity and exquisite beauty. I realized that I was experiencing what had been called in the ancient Indian scriptures the union of Atman and Brahman.

My second encounter with Shiva happened many years later, during my vision quest in the Ventana wilderness in Big Sur. In an overnight LSD session that took place near a waterfall in a redwood dell, I had the vision of a giant archetypal river, representing time and the impermanence of all creation. It flowed back into what appeared to be the source of all existence—an immense ball of radiating energy that was conscious, possessed infinite intelligence, and was simultaneously creative and destructive. I heard a compelling sound and knew instantly that it was dambaru, the drum of Shiva Bhairava, the Destroyer, commanding all creation to return where it came from.

The history of the universe and of the Earth was passing in front of my eyes. As if in an incredibly sped-up movie, I saw the birth, development, and death of galaxies and stars. I observed the beginning, evolution, and extinction of species and witnessed cultures and dynasties originating, flourishing, and facing destruction. The most memorable sequence of this session was a procession of dinosaurs of all shapes and sizes entering after millions of years of existence the River of Time and disappearing in it. Permeating this amazing scenery like a magnificent cosmic hologram was a giant figure of Shiva Nataraja, Lord of the Cosmic Dance, performing his dance of the universe. After sunrise, when my

attention turned from my inner world to the incredible beauty of nature around me, I heard for many hours in my ears the enticing and irresistible chant "Om, hare Om, hare Om, Shri Om," which I had heard throughout this unforgettable experience as a leitmotif of the River of Time.

I finished telling Christina about these two experiences, which had transformed my life, just when it was time for our darshan. As we entered the room and saw Swami Muktananda, I was struck by his extraordinary appearance. He wore a thick red ski cap, large dark glasses, and the lunghi, an orange robe. In his right hand he held a wand of peacock feathers, which—as I found out later—was heavily scented with fragrant sandalwood essence. Hitting people with peacock feathers over the head was one of Swami Muktananda's principal tools for imparting the shaktipat.

Baba, as his followers fondly called him, invited me to sit down next to him and turned his head toward me. He then took off his dark glasses, something he very rarely did, and he started to inspect my face from a short distance. I saw in a close-up his widely dilated pupils, which seemed to be floating freely on his eyeballs; this was something I was used to seeing in my clients who had taken large doses of LSD. He focused his sight on my eyes and examined them with the thoroughness of an ophthalmologist. As if summarizing his professional observations, he suddenly uttered a phrase that sent chills up my spine: "I can tell you are a man who has seen Shiva."

I was astonished by this extraordinary synchronicity. Muktananda's statement came only a few minutes after I had finished telling Christina about my experiences of Shiva and their importance for my life. It was absolutely impossible for Muktananda to have any knowledge of this fact had he relied on ordinary information channels. It was also hard to imagine that this was only a meaningless coincidence. The probability of something as specific as this being a result of chance was so low that it could be practically excluded. I could see only two possible explanations for what had just happened. Swami Muktananda had to have paranormal access to information about facts in the surrounding world or be part of a field that fostered meaningful synchronicities in the Jungian sense.

My curiosity concerning Muktananda and interest in spending some time with him increased considerably after what had just happened. Our exchange following this dramatic opening seemed at first anticlimactic, although the topic of our discussion was quite interesting for me from a professional point of view. Muktananda knew that I had worked with LSD and initiated a discussion about the use of psychoactive substances in spiritual practice. He expressed his belief that the experiences induced by them were closely related to those sought in Siddha Yoga.

"I understand you have been working with LSD," he said through his interpreter, Malti, a young Indian woman whom he many years later appointed as his successor under the name Swami Chitvilasananda. "We do something very similar here. But the difference is that, in Siddha Yoga, we teach people not only to get high, but to stay high," he stated with confidence. "With LSD you can have great experiences, but then you come down. There are many serious spiritual seekers in India, Brahmans and yogis, who use sacred plants in their spiritual practice," Swami Muktananda continued, "but they know how to do it properly."

He then talked about the need for a respectful ritual approach to cultivation, preparation, and smoking or ingesting of Indian hemp (*Cannabis indica*) in the form of bhang, ganja, or charas and criticized the casual and irreverent use of marijuana and hashish by the young generation in the West. "The yogis grow and harvest the plant very consciously and with great devotion," he said. "They first soak it in water for fourteen days to get rid of all the toxic ingredients and then dry it. They put it in a *chilam* (a special pipe) and smoke it. And then they lie naked in the snow and ice of the Himalayas in ecstasy." Talking about smoking the chilam and the ecstatic rapture of the yogis, Baba acted out the appropriate facial expressions, movements, and postures as if remembering what it was like.

In the course of our discussion, I asked Baba about soma, the sacred potion of ancient India that is mentioned more than a thousand times in the *Rig Veda* and that clearly played a critical role in the Vedic religion. This sacrament was prepared from a plant of the same name, the identity of which got lost over the

centuries. I found the reports about soma fascinating and hoped that Swami Muktananda might know something that would lead to its botanical identification and, ultimately, to the isolation of its active principle. Discovering the secret of soma was at the time the dream of many of us who were involved in psychedelic research.

Talking about soma, Muktananda dismissed the theory expounded by my mycologist Gordon Wasson that this plant was *Amanita muscaria*, the fly agaric mushroom. He assured me that soma was not a mushroom, but a "creeper." This seemed to make sense and did not particularly surprise me because another important item in the psychedelic pharmacopoeia, the famous Mesoamerican sacrament ololiuqui, was a preparation containing the seeds of morning glory (*Ipomoea violacea*), which would qualify as a creeper plant because it grows with the help of tendrils.

But what followed came as a great surprise to me. Baba not only knew what soma was, but he assured me that it was still being used in India to this very day. As a mater of fact, he claimed that he was in regular contact with Vedic priests who were using it in their rituals. And, according to Baba, some of these priests actually came every year down from the mountains to Ganeshpuri, a little village south of Bombay that hosted his ashram, to celebrate his birthday. On this occasion, they regularly conducted soma ceremonies. At the end of our discussion, Baba extended his invitation to Christina and me to visit his ashram at the time of his birthday and promised to make arrangements for us to participate in this ancient ritual.

By and large, it seemed that the darshan would have the form of a quasi-professional exchange of information about "technologies of the sacred." But then the situation took a sudden, unexpected turn. Without any preparation or warning, Muktananda brusquely reached for a pink can of Almond Rocca that was displayed on a small table on his side. There were always many sweets around the ashram because Baba made it clear that Shakti, the divine feminine energy, had a great affinity for sweets. Amrit, the ashram's well-stocked cafeteria, abounded in the most incredible confections of all kinds. Muktananda now fished out of the can two pieces of this candy,

skillfully unwrapped them, and stuffed them into my mouth while simultaneously slapping me quite strongly on both of my cheeks, hitting me on the forehead, and kicking me on my shins.

Then he stood up, making it clear that the darshan was coming to an end. At the door, as we were on the way out, he looked at Christina and me and said: "We'll have two weekend intensives on Kashmir Shaivism; I invite you both as my guests." Before I left the room, he gave me a meaningful look and said: "It will be very interesting for you." At that time, I did not know anything about Kashmir Shaivism; I could only infer from the name that it had something to do with Shiva and with Kashmir. We thanked Muktananda, said good-bye, and walked out of the darshan room into the spacious meditation hall of the ashram.

Outside the darshan room was a large crowd of people, waiting for us to come out. Most of them seemed to be people who had been brought to Siddha Yoga by their psychedelic experiences. They suspected that my discussion with Muktananda would include psychedelics and wanted to know if he had said anything about this subject. I had to walk through a gauntlet of these people showering me with questions, such as: "What did you talk about? Did Baba say anything about acid? Did Baba think psychedelics were okay?"

I did not feel the least inclination to socialize. I was aware of some strange sensations in my body and felt that something was churning inside my head. I apologized, disentangled myself from the crowd, and walked into the farthest area of the meditation hall. There I sat down in a cross-legged position, with my back pressed into the corner, and with my eyes closed. I felt this would be the best way to get a better insight into what was happening to me.

Siddha yogis have the reputation of being able to awaken the inner psychic energy by shaktipat, and I knew that what Muktananda had done with me belonged to this category. However, I did not expect any significant reaction because I did not consider myself particularly suggestible. I did not think, at that time, that anything short of a potent psychoactive drug would significantly change my consciousness. And I knew from literature and from my experience with Christina that a typical response to shaktipat involved kriyas—intense

emotions, involuntary sounds, and dramatic motor responses. My own reaction took me by surprise.

Seconds after closing my eyes, I found myself in a state of complete nothingness and emptiness, in a void that had cosmic dimensions. One way of describing my condition would be to say that it felt like being suspended in interstellar space, somewhere midway between the Earth and Alpha Centauri. However, this would pertain only to a very superficial aspect of this experience and would not capture the sense of profound peace and tranquility of this condition and the extraordinary metaphysical insights associated with it. I felt that I was in a state that transcended all polarities and that I had a total understanding of existence. It seemed that this cosmic vacuum somehow held the secret of being and creation. When I opened my eyes again, I found out that more than an hour had elapsed since the darshan had ended.

We gladly accepted Baba's invitation for the weekend intensives on Kashmir Shaivism, Christina because of her devotion to the guru and myself because of the curiosity aroused by the peculiar synchronicity and my unusual experience. The first intensive turned out to be another surprising and very interesting experience. It started with an introductory lecture on Kashmir Shaivism, delivered by Swami Tejo, a member of the Muktananda staff. As the swami began talking, I found myself increasingly baffled and slightly paranoid. He seemed to be reading passages from an article that I had written and published several years earlier in one of the last issues of a short-lived, obscure periodical, *Journal for the Study of Consciousness.* The similarity was astonishing, down to specific images and metaphors.

In the late 1960s, when I was still working at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center, I decided to write a paper describing the ontological and cosmological insights that become available in non-ordinary states of consciousness. It was based on observations from over five thousand psychedelic sessions that my colleagues and I had conducted in Prague and in Baltimore. I extracted those parts of our clients' reports where they tackled some fundamental problems of existence—the nature of reality, mystery of the cosmic creative principle, the process of creation of the universe, the relationship

between humans and the divine, the role of evil in the universal fabric, reincarnation and karma, the enigma of time and space, and the like.

I found to my surprise that the individual metaphysical insights of my clients were strikingly similar from person to person and that they constituted various partial aspects of one overarching cosmic vision. This extraordinary perspective on the cosmos and human existence that emerged from this analysis was radically different from the one formulated by Newtonian-Cartesian materialistic science. However, it bore striking similarity to various spiritual systems to which Aldous Huxley referred to as perennial philosophy.

Many aspects of this vision also showed impressive convergence with the worldview of quantum-relativistic physics and other revolutionary advances in modern science, usually described as the "new" or "emerging" paradigm. The article discussing my findings, entitled "LSD and the Cosmic Game: Outline of Psychedelic Cosmology and Ontology," had been published in 1972, three years before the Oakland intensive took place. Twenty-six years later, this article became the basis for my book *The Cosmic Game: Explorations of the Frontiers of Human Consciousness.*

And, in his introductory talk in the Oakland intensive, Swami Tejo seemed to shamelessly plagiarize my ideas. It took me a while before I realized that what he was describing was actually Kashmir Shaivism and not passages from my paper. This was truly astonishing because more than a millennium and thousands of miles separated the origins of this spiritual philosophy and the insights of my clients. The beginnings of Kashmir Shaivism can be traced back to the eighth century A.D., when a Kashmiri sage had a vision that directed him to a specific location outside of Shrinagar, the country's capital. There he found sacred inscriptions carved in the rock that later became *Shiva Sutras,* the principal sacred text of Kashmir Shaivism. Nobody knows who their author was or how long they had been there before their discovery.

It was difficult to believe that the experiences of twentieth-century subjects, central Europeans of Slavic or Jewish origin, Caucasian Americans, and African Americans, who had ingested LSD-25, could bear such a deep resemblance to passages from ancient Kashmiri texts. What was the relationship

between the effects of a semisynthetic psychoactive substance, discovered by a strange serendipity by a Swiss chemist, and philosophical insights described in the scriptures of an ancient spiritual discipline? And what was the explanation for the fact that they were not erratic and delirious products of the individual psyches, but took the form of a shared, internally consistent, well-integrated, and comprehensive cosmic vision?

It took me some time to find the solution to this puzzle, but once I had it, the answer seemed quite obvious. LSD was not a pharmacological agent generating exotic experiences by its interaction with the neurophysiological processes in the brain. This remarkable substance was clearly an unspecific catalyst of the deep dynamics of the human psyche. The experiences induced by it were not neurochemical artifacts, symptoms of a toxic psychosis as mainstream psychiatrists called it, but genuine manifestations of the human psyche itself. These experiences could then naturally be triggered by many other approaches, including various "technologies of the sacred," developed by Eastern spiritual disciplines.

Our friendship with Swami Muktananda continued until his death seven years later and formed an important part of our life. Christina and I had many additional personal darshans with him and attended a number of Siddha Yoga meditations and weekend intensives in different parts of the world. During these years, I also had ample opportunity to compare spontaneous experiences of people who had received shaktipat with those that were induced by psychedelics, and could confirm their remarkable similarity.

Shortly after my first meeting with Baba, Christina and I developed Holotropic Breathwork, a powerful nonpharmacological method of self-exploration and therapy. With this approach, non-ordinary states of consciousness are induced by very simple and natural means—faster breathing, evocative music, and release of blocked energies by a certain form of bodywork. The experiences triggered by this approach can be very powerful, and they resemble both the states induced by psychedelics and those described in Kashmir Shaivism. They thus represent an additional proof that the phenomena induced by LSD and other similar substances are not chemical artifacts, but genuine expressions of the human psyche.

Our relationship with Swami Muktananda deepened and intensified in the last years of his life. During a darshan following the conference of the International Transpersonal Association (ITA) in Danvers, Massachusetts, he suggested that we hold one of the future ITA meetings in India, and he offered us his personal support, as well as the help of his staff and of the Ganeshpuri ashram. The conference was held in the Oberoi Hotel in Bombay in February 1982, several months before Baba's death. It was called Ancient Wisdom and Modern Science and provided a forum for exchange between new paradigm scientists and spiritual teachers.

The program had a stellar cast; it featured brain researcher Karl Pribram, physicist Fritjof Capra, biologist Rupert Sheldrake, family therapist Virginia Satir, neurophysiologists Elmer and Alyce Green, child development expert Joseph Chilton Pearce, and many other scientists. The spiritual world was represented by Swami Muktananda, Mother Teresa, Parsee high priest Dastoor Minocheer Homji, Turkish Sufi Sheik Muzafer Ozak Al-Jerrahi, Taoist Master Chungliang Al Huang, Aurobindo scholar Karan Singh, Benedictine monk Father Bede Griffith, and rabbis Zalman Schachter-Shalomi and Shlomo Carlebach. Among the highlights of the cultural program was an evening of Hassidic dances, sufi zikr of the Halveti Jerrahi dervishes, musician Paul Horn, and Alarmel Valli, the rising star of Indian classical dance. The meeting was a thundering success in spite of the absence of the Dalai Lama, who could not deliver his opening address because he fell ill on his way from Dharamsala to Bombay, and of the Karmapa, who had died a few months before the conference and was not able to close the conference with the promised Black Crown ceremony.

On the day following the conference, Baba invited all 700 participants to his ashram in Ganeshpuri for a *bandara*, a traditional Indian feast. As it turned out, Baba's presentation at the Bombay ITA conference was his last public appearance. When the meeting ended, he retreated into his quarters in the Ganeshpuri ashram, where he spent most of his time in silence, making gradual preparations for the transmission of the Siddha lineage and his own demise. Christina and I spent two weeks on a pilgrimage to various sacred sites in India and then

returned to Ganeshpuri for our final two weeks with Baba. He appeared in the marble-covered courtyard twice a day and sat there in silence, while the ashram residents and visitors paid homage to him and offered various gifts.

Everything seemed to indicate that we would not have another chance to talk to him or see him privately. That unexpectedly changed two days before our departure. Noni, Baba's personal valet, delivered to us a message that Baba wanted to see us. He wanted us to come at five o'clock to the meditation hall, where he would "tune up our meditation." The meditation Hall was the spiritual heart of the ashram. It was built around the place where Muktananda's own guru and powerful Siddha yogi Nityananda lived in a cottage. This place was marked by a large hide of a tiger, the animal consecrated to Shiva. One of its doors opened into Baba's bedroom, another one to the staircase descending underground to the Tiger Cave, another favorite place for meditation.

Christina and I arrived in the dark meditation hall at the appointed hour and sat down on a large hide. We might have meditated for about five minutes, when the door of Baba's private quarters quietly opened up and he walked in. Without saying a word, he approached Christina and pressed on her eyeballs, maintaining the pressure for about fifteen or twenty seconds. Then he moved on to me and did the same. I felt his thumbs delving so deep into my eyes that they seemed to be touching my retinas. I experienced an indescribable pain and pressure in my head and had to control my impulse to interrupt this procedure. I felt that nobody, not even a Siddha guru, should be allowed to do with my eyes what Muktananda was doing. But my curiosity took over, and I said to myself: "This is very interesting; stay with it!" And I did.

The pressure grew to intolerable intensity and then my head exploded into a brilliant light that gradually turned into a vision of star-filled sky. I experienced an ecstatic rapture of truly cosmic proportions, which ended in a state of blissful emptiness, similar to the one I had experienced after I had first received shaktipat from Muktananda. This experience matched those in my high-dose psychedelic sessions in terms of its intensity, but it was of shorter duration. Christina's experiences were equally powerful, but they continued throughout the night. They brought a chain of memories of abuse that she

had suffered from various male figures in her life. She felt that it was a major emotional clearing and healing of old traumas.

The next day, Noni brought us a message that Baba wanted to see us in the meditation hall at the same hour for "round two," as he called it. This time, he repeated the same procedure of compressing our eyeballs, but added another element. He pressed his forehead, decorated with several ashen horizontal stripes—the sign of Shiva—against ours and forcefully blew air into our nostrils. This time, the resulting experience was very positive for both of us. In the morning of our last day in the ashram, shortly before our departure, Baba unexpectedly invited us into his private quarters for a darshan. In retrospect, it became clear that this was meant to be the final good-bye.

At the beginning of this meeting, he gave us each a meditation shawl and a beautiful dark amethyst. Then he broke his silence and told us that we should have the amethysts set in gold and made into rings. He emphasized that it was very important that we wear these rings all the time. As we were parting, Baba surprised us with an enigmatic sentence: "Go back and continue to work with people! I will help you. You are doing my work!" And he motioned us to leave. This was the last time we saw Baba, and all that remained were memories of this remarkable human being and of the play of consciousness that he represented.

Devotees often try to explain scandalous events that happen around their gurus by saying that large light casts a big shadow and that such problems are caused by dark forces fighting enlightenment. Swami Muktananda's light must have been very bright because its shadow was large and dark. The final months of his life were tainted with ugly rumors about his sexual abuse of young girls. Some of his devotees were appalled by what they considered hypocrisy and an inexcusable flaw of their guru and left the movement. Others decided not to believe these rumors or tried to excuse this behavior by seeing it as some advanced Tantric practice, culturally acceptable in India but misunderstood in the West.

After Muktananda's death, the situation was further confounded by a profound dissent between Chitvilasananda and Nityananda, the two siblings to

whom he passed the Siddha Yoga lineage. The ugly intrigues that were involved were widely publicized by Indian and American press and further deepened the already existing rift in the inner circles of Siddha Yoga, as well as in the larger group of followers all over the world that, according to some estimates, exceeded one hundred thousand.

Christina and I visited the Ganeshpuri ashram twice more, but the magic of the old days was gone. We have dissociated ourselves from the movement and its politics, but remain connected to the Siddha movement on another level. Baba continued to appear in our dreams and various non-ordinary states of consciousness. We also have repeatedly had experiences of participation in powerful Siddha rituals in which we felt a strong connection with what we call "Shiva energy."

The Guru in the Life of His Devotees

Is the Siddha Yogi a Cosmic Puppeteer?

One of the most extraordinary aspects of our experience with Swami Muktananda and Siddha Yoga was the astonishing incidence of synchronicities in the lives of Muktananda's followers. We heard about them on a regular basis from our friends and acquaintances who were associated with the Siddha Yoga movement. The weekend intensives offered by the various ashrams regularly featured speakers who told their remarkable stories about meeting Baba. These stories contained without any exception descriptions of fantastic coincidences similar to those that introduced me to the world of Siddha Yoga.

One example came from a man who spent some time in an Australian ghost town looking for leftover gems in abandoned mines. At the time, he lived alone in a ramshackle cabin. During the long evenings, he tried to read using the light of a candle. One of the previous dwellers had left on the wall of the cabin a picture of a strange dark-skinned man in a red ski cap holding a wand of peacock feathers. It happened to be a portrait of Swami Muktananda, although there was no inscription on the photograph identifying him as such.

In one of his lone evenings, the gem hunter lifted his eyes from the book he was reading and became captivated by the face of the man on the picture. As he was focusing on the eyes, he experienced a radiant thunderbolt that seem to emanate from the portrayed man's pupils and hit him between the eyes. It triggered powerful waves of emotions and a strong